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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4047  
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 KHARTOUM 000811

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SUBJECT: DARFUR HUMANITARIAN UPDATE

REFS: A) KHARTOUM 746  
B) KHARTOUM 802

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SUMMARY  
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11. (SBU) The number of security incidents involving the UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Darfur has remained stable, with no increases reported in recent weeks. Nevertheless, the situation on the ground is unpredictable, with security remaining a primary concern for agencies. (Note: Security incidents typically decrease during the rainy season. End note.) As of mid-May, the UN reported that conflict among armed opposition factions, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and ethnic groups had displaced more than 137,000 people in Darfur since January 2009 alone, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to more than 2.7 million.

12. (SBU) The loss of key partners in all critical sectors has reduced the quality of humanitarian operations in some areas. While programs have been able to continue utilizing local staff and augmented-assistance from government line ministries, USAID notes that program management, monitoring, and quality have decreased. Given reduced access to rural populations due to lack of agencies in these areas, as well as ongoing Government of Sudan (GOS) restrictions, combined with the current quality of humanitarian programming, relief agencies note that the humanitarian situation in Darfur could potentially deteriorate during the coming months of the hunger season. End summary.

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Key Humanitarian Vulnerabilities in Darfur  
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13. (U) Ongoing conflict, displacement, and insecurity continue to affect populations in Darfur. As of mid-May, the UN reported that conflict among armed opposition factions, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and ethnic groups had displaced more than 137,000 people in Darfur since January 2009, bringing the total number of IDPs to more than 2.7 million. Attacks on humanitarian workers and assets, while showing a decrease during the ongoing rainy season, continue to impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations in need. On July 3, the third incident of international NGO staff

abduction in Darfur since the expulsions occurred in Kutum, North Darfur. On July 3 at 2035 hours, six unknown armed assailants attacked the GOAL international compound in Kutum and kidnapped two GOAL international staff and one local guard. According to initial reports, the assailants forced the staff into a land cruiser and drove west toward Amou, North Darfur. Local security officials pursued the vehicle but were unable to overtake the assailants. Shortly thereafter, GOAL staff learned that the local guard had been released in Amou. As of July 6, the whereabouts of the abducted international staff remain unknown. To date, no contact has been made with the abductors and no ransom has been demanded. Intermittent SAF aerial bombing campaigns persist in rural areas.

¶4. (U) The early March expulsion of 13 large international agencies and dissolution of three national NGOs revealed and/or resulted in several key humanitarian vulnerabilities in the aid operation. In response, the humanitarian community has focused extensively on filling the gaps left by these organizations in the life-saving sectors of food, health and nutrition, and water, sanitation, and hygiene. UN agencies and the remaining 65 to 70 smaller NGOs, in coordination with the Government of National Unity (GNU), have initiated numerous short-term measures and expanded existing programs and areas of operation to prevent a rapid deterioration of humanitarian conditions in northern Sudan. Although current short-term measures have temporarily and quantitatively filled the majority of the gaps left by the expulsions, the initiatives are not intended to replace sustainable, longer-term programs to meet humanitarian needs. In addition, relief agencies have begun to emphasize that gap-filling is only one piece of a much larger humanitarian picture, noting ongoing needs and existing vulnerabilities that were exacerbated by the expulsions.

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Reduced Humanitarian Access  
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¶4. (U) The staff reduction caused by the expulsions has particularly affected humanitarian access to remote areas and contested locations, severely limiting early warning reporting. Without relief agencies present in these locations, information regarding current concerns is unavailable for areas that have typically presented some of the most significant humanitarian needs.

¶5. (SBU) In addition, many organizations continue to face procedural delays when attempting to expand programs to fill identified humanitarian gaps in particular locations. Delays include refusing to approve technical agreements (TAs) and Sudanese government non-compliance with agreed travel notification procedures, particularly to locations in South Darfur. NGO staff report that, despite the Ministerial Decree and recent statements by Presidential Advisor Dr. Ghazi Salahuddin regarding the sufficiency of travel notification for NGO travel rather than travel permits, security checkpoints throughout South Darfur continue to frequently, although inconsistently, demand travel permits for staff travel outside of Nyala. One USAID partner notes that the frequent demands by checkpoint officials for travel permits have led the organization to opt for requesting travel permits rather than submitting a travel notification to ensure that staff may travel unimpeded to project sites. In the USAID partner's view, harassment at checkpoints in South Darfur has increased since the announcement of the Ministerial Decree and Dr. Ghazi's visit. Security officials in North Darfur have also inconsistently applied the requirement for travel permits despite the Ministerial Decree, most recently demanding seven-day advance notice and requests for approval for travel to Kutum town, North Darfur.

¶6. (SBU) In addition, partners report that some of the delays in completing TAs result from the fact that state-level Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) officials, particularly in West Darfur, are demanding that NGOs include what the latter deem to be an unsuitable national NGO partner in the TA. NGOs note inconsistent application of this requirement, with some NGOs obtaining TAs without a national NGO partner, but other NGOs experiencing pressure

from the HAC to accept national partners unilaterally chosen by the HAC. On June 25, one of the pending TAs was signed by the West Darfur HAC, with the international NGO agreeing to find a national NGO partner, while two other pending TAs remained unsigned.

¶7. (SBU) In Kalma camp, South Darfur, which remains one of the largest camps with continued humanitarian gaps following the March expulsions (ref. A), bureaucratic impediments employed by state authorities have prevented USAID partners Merlin and International Medical Corps (IMC) from fully commencing activities to fill the gaps left by expelled NGOs, nearly three months after the organizations submitted requests for approval to work in the camp. On June 22, USAID partner American Refugee Committee (ARC) began implementing water, sanitation, and hygiene activities in the camp after state and federal-level authorities finally approved ARC's TA on June 18. However, while IMC has a signed TA for health activities throughout South Darfur, which in theory includes Kalma, the South Darfur Deputy Wali, or deputy governor, has refused to permit the organization to initiate health activities in one of the former clinics in the camp. On June 29, Merlin received approval from the HAC to conduct health activities in the camp. However, local officials have insisted that Merlin assume responsibility for both health clinics rather than only one. The officials have also denied permission for Merlin to initiate nutrition activities, asserting that the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) may continue the Kalma nutrition program. [Note: Since the expulsions, UNICEF has been providing salary support to former nutrition workers as a stop-gap measure to maintain services in the camp. End note.] However, UNICEF emphasized that it is not an implementing agency and, thus, is unable to continue supporting the nutrition program in Kalma. On July 2, UNICEF submitted a letter to the State Ministry of Health and the South Darfur HAC Commissioner requesting that authorities grant Merlin permission to implement nutrition programs in Kalma, as UNICEF support for the activities would soon cease. On July 2, the South Darfur HAC requested that Merlin begin working on a technical agreement with the SMOH, including the health and nutrition project details needed to implement work in Kalma. In addition, the HAC committed to discuss these issues at the next South Darfur High-Level Committee meeting scheduled for the evening of July 2.

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Delayed Assessments and Reduced Reporting  
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¶8. (SBU) Independent assessments are critical to shaping and targeting humanitarian operations. However, NGOs and UN agencies are often denied access to populations to undertake assessments, particularly in outlying locations and politically sensitive areas. When assessments are undertaken, the GNU HAC often does not permit public release of the assessment results. (Note: Humanitarian agencies faced challenges in conducting assessments and sharing the results long before the NGO expulsions. For example, the HAC has obstructed the release of the Darfur Nutrition Assessment since October 2008. End note.) With fewer relief agencies present throughout Darfur, accurate and timely assessment information needed to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those most vulnerable is lacking.

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Diminished Quality of Humanitarian Programs  
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¶9. (U) The loss of key partners in critical sectors has reduced the overall quality of humanitarian operations. While programs have been able to continue utilizing local staff and augmented assistance from government line ministries, USAID notes that program management, monitoring, and overall quality have decreased. Failure to replace short-term, stop-gap measures with the technically-sound programs that existed prior to the March 4 expulsions has reduced humanitarian effectiveness. This, in turn, increases the chances of a humanitarian deterioration by the end of 2009-particularly during the rainy season and concomitant hunger gap.

¶10. (SBU) Reductions in program quality include intermittent staffing of health and nutrition facilities, lack of oversight and monitoring for technical quality, decreased capacity for verification activities, and limited coverage of remote and contested areas. In addition, without NGOs present that possess the capacity to monitor distributions of food and relief commodities, humanitarian agencies note that the most vulnerable populations may be marginalized, and the potential exists for misdirected assistance.

¶11. (SBU) In the health and nutrition sector, relief agencies indicate that the mere presence of a clinic does not necessarily fill the gap left by expelled organizations. The clinics, which are now primarily run by the Ministry of Health (MoH), typically lack adequate drugs and adequately-trained and motivated staff. In addition, relief agencies note that beneficiaries sometimes avoid accessing health services, even if in a nearby clinic, due to concerns that the health workers will not provide impartial, appropriate care. Many conflict-affected populations remain suspicious of government-sponsored assistance; thus, over-reliance on MoH-run facilities only appears to fill gaps, but does not address the underlying concerns and needs of beneficiaries.

¶12. (SBU) In addition, dependence upon UN agencies and government line ministries, particularly in the health, nutrition, food, and water, sanitation, and hygiene sectors, to conduct direct implementation of programs is unsustainable. Such dependence risks creating gaps in assistance or deterioration of program quality due to the limited duration of stop-gap funding and unavailability of staff for adequate monitoring. USAID believes that donors will be reluctant to fund programs in which quality and capacity for targeting are questionable.

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Lack of Verification for Population Movements  
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¶13. (SBU) Although limited displacement continues in Darfur, the Sudanese government is strongly encouraging IDP returns. However, the GOS continues to restrict the work of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the primary organization with the mandate to verify the appropriateness and voluntary nature of returns (ref B). In 2004 and 2006, the GOS and IOM signed memoranda of understanding outlining the principles, roles, and responsibilities for voluntary IDP returns and affirming IOM as the

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lead agency in verifying population movements and assessing related needs. However, GOS bureaucratic impediments, particularly in South Darfur, are preventing IOM from fully performing this critical role.

Security officials have denied IOM access to areas of reported population movements, prevented IOM from participating in interagency assessments, and impeded staff travel both to state capitals and rural areas. Without a capable and trusted agency present to conduct verification activities, humanitarian organizations are often called upon by the GOS to provide immediate assistance to "returnees" without confirmation that the population movements were voluntary and appropriate.

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Obstruction of Protection Activities  
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¶14. (SBU) Of all sectors affected by the March NGO expulsions, the protection sector lost the most NGO capacity, with six out of the thirteen expelled international organizations directly involved in protection-related activities and two of the three dissolved national NGOs previously implementing protection programs. Relief agencies have raised significant concerns that the decreased presence of NGO international and local staff has left many parts of Darfur vulnerable to under- or non-reporting on human rights issues and other abuses. Humanitarian partners note that the mere presence of NGO staff in an area should be considered a critical form of protection for IDPs and other conflict-affected populations.

¶15. (SBU) In addition, the Sudanese government continues to obstruct

the work of the UN global cluster lead for protection, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In 2007, UNHCR planned to expand its operation to include protection and camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) activities in North and South Darfur from its primarily refugee-based focus in West Darfur. Despite signing a letter of understanding with UNHCR acknowledging UNHCR's role in protection throughout Darfur, the GOS continues to delay full approval for UNHCR activities, and, until recently, prevented UNHCR staff from traveling to South Darfur. [Note: Although UNHCR states that it theoretically does not need permission to commence protection and CCCM activities, in practice, GOS agreement is essential to facilitating all of the necessary bureaucratic procedures for full operation, including permission to travel. End note.]

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Comment  
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¶16. (SBU) While the UN and the Sudanese government's quantitative assessments of gap-filling may appear impressive on paper, with nearly 100 percent coverage of all of the major life-saving sectors, NGOs and UN staff on the ground paint a less rosy picture of the quality and sustainability of these interventions, as well as the percentage of the overall humanitarian needs being fully addressed. The stop-gap measures have prevented a sharp deterioration in humanitarian indicators in Darfur. However, a clear picture of the humanitarian conditions in Darfur is unavailable due to reduced access and coverage following the NGO expulsions, as well as diminished humanitarian capacity for reporting and assessments. USAID notes that the humanitarian situation in Darfur remains tenuous, with signs of potential improvement with the small-scale returns occurring, but significant ongoing vulnerabilities. Additionally, it is essential that the international community not lose sight of the pre-expulsion needs in Darfur by focusing only on the quantitative filling of gaps left by the expulsions.

¶17. (SBU) The Special Envoy's initiatives to reinvigorate the peace process in Darfur and improve security conditions, if successful, would shift, but not obviate the need for humanitarian interventions there. Displaced- population returns due to improved security conditions would require needs-verification in areas of return as well as provision of assistance in locations where NGOs currently lack a presence. IOM is willing to work with the GOS to facilitate the government's goal of reducing camp populations and returning IDPs to villages of origin. However, this process must be undertaken in cooperation with the organization so that it can verify returns are voluntary and orderly, as well as assess returning populations' needs for assistance. Providing appropriate interventions in areas of return and ensuring that returnees do not go back to camps due to

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lack of services is in the Sudanese government's interest. In addition, timely commencement of UNHCR activities in North and South Darfur is critical to providing populations, whether returning or remaining in camps, with adequate protection in the not-yet-stable environment that characterizes Darfur.

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